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RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 0005
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0258
RHMFSS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1286
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 0895
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000389

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TAGS: MARR MCAP KPKO PREL UN IR LE FJ TN
SUBJECT: FIJI AND TONGA: PROSPECTS FOR IRAQ PKO

REF: A. SUVA 370

1B. SUVA352 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Amb. Dinger Sec. 1.4 (B,D)

Summary

11. (C) Fiji's Cabinet subcommittee has postponed considering PKO issues until Home Affairs Minister Vosanibola returns from a trip to New York and the Middle East. Vosanibola has bones to pick with the UN about UNAMI and UNIFIL issues. He is open to considering Fiji participation in the Coalition in Iraq (MNFI), and his visit to Baghdad will be an opportunity. Regarding Tonga: with the death and burial of the King, the issue of an additional deployment to Iraq can now receive Defense Board attention. A meeting is predicted for Sept. 129. PM Sevele asked us for further sweeteners ("insurance" for Tonga troops; a more convenient U.S. visa process). On this security issue, we expect the key player is the new King, and he is known to be "pro-military." End Summary.

Fiji Cabinet subcommittee meeting postponed

12. (C) Fiji Home Affairs Minister Vosanibola has postponed Cabinet subcommittee consideration of PKO issues until after his trip to New York, the Sinai, Iraq, and Sudan, scheduled to commence Sept. 23 and conclude Oct. 12. Another factor is that the senior Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs officials who recently traveled to the Middle East to evaluate Fiji's PKO participation have not yet submitted their report. (See reftels.) Vosanibola wants to have that report plus his own on-scene observations before convening the Cabinet subcommittee.

Unhappiness about UNAMI and UNIFIL approaches

13. (C) Vosanibola told us Sept. 22 that a primary focus of his trip is to discuss Fiji's UN deployments with officials in New York. Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Commander Bainimarama will accompany Vosanibola for that leg of the trip. Vosanibola said he is "not satisfied" with aspects of the UN-Fiji MOU covering UNAMI participation. He did not elaborate, but we hear a major issue is the package of benefits, which Fiji considers inadequate for the dangers inherent in the Iraq deployment. Reportedly, Fiji might pull out of UNAMI if its concerns are not addressed. Vosanibola said he also will raise Lebanon. Given Fiji's 24 years of participation in UNIFIL prior to 2002, including at top leadership levels, Vosanibola gave the impression Fiji has

been rather insulted by the sorts of roles the UN has offered the RFMF in Lebanon now: basically low-level guard duties. Fiji is prepared to consider returning to UNIFIL; but we hear both military and civilian leaders are thinking staff positions, including at senior levels, rather than troops on the streets.

Openness to considering MNFI

¶4. (C) Vosanibola told us he would be happy to meet with U.S. officials during his visit to Iraq to discuss possible RFMF participation in the MNFI. Fiji has requested meetings for Vosanibola with the U.S., UK, and Australian Ambassadors; and if Gen. Casey or his designee could be available to discuss MNFI participation, Vosanibola said he would gladly listen. He has heard that the RFMF commander and forces with UNAMI have built good relationships with U.S. senior officers, which he much appreciates. We noted that, at Home Affairs request, we have provided informal guidance on what sorts of assistance Fiji could expect from the U.S. to support an RFMF deployment to the MNFI.

Tonga PM still dickering re Iraq deployment

¶5. (C) After the funeral for Tonga's King, the Ambassador met with Tongan Prime Minister Sevele on Sept. 21. Sevele noted that he is aware of the advantages to Tonga and to the Tonga Defense Service (TDS) of an additional deployment of troops to the MNFI. He added that he looks at "the political side" as well. He would like to see a couple of additional sweeteners from the USG. Tonga provides a payment of T\$15,000 to the family of a TDS soldier who dies. Sevele believes that, given the risks in Iraq, the U.S. should "insure" to supplement that amount for any TDS troops

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deployed to the MNFI. He noted that the Commander, TDS, BG Uta'atu, had informed him such insurance is probably not possible. Sevele also asked for the USG to reconsider its visa-interview policy that currently forces Tonga applicants to travel to Embassy Suva for an interview. He noted, rightly, that the policy is very inconvenient and expensive. We reiterated past explanations that U.S. law and regulation force the inconvenience and that the State Department is looking for ways to ease the pain; however, for now at least, we have no options. We emphasized the gratitude of the U.S. for Tonga PKO deployments, as illustrated by the attendance of Commander, U.S. Army Pacific, LTGEN Brown at the King's funeral, the highest ranking military officer present.

Tonga Defense Board 9/29? Pro-military King

¶6. (C) With the death of the late King and his burial, the Tonga Defense Board is now expected to meet on Sept. 29 to consider the MNFI-deployment issue. Both Sevele and Foreign Minister Tua declined to predict the Defense Board's decision, not wanting to preempt the King's options. However, another senior official involved in the process noted that the new King "loves" the military and is likely to steer the Defense Board toward a positive decision. BG Uta'atu told us he has primed the key players, including Sevele.

Comment

¶7. (C) Per ref A, Fiji Home Affairs State Minister Konrote and CEO Korovavala have told us they are on board for the RFMF to join the MNFI. Vosanibola continues to hold his cards close to the chest, but his visit to Baghdad is certainly an opportunity. To the extent the U.S. wants Fiji participation in UNAMI and UNIFIL as well, Vosanibola's discussions in New York will color his vision of those endeavors. With Tonga, we are in "wait and see" mode, pending the Defense Board's meeting. If Washington has something to offer regarding PM Sevele's query about "insurance" for TDS soldiers deployed to Iraq, please advise.

We did not encourage the PM on that, or on the visa-processing issue. Our guess is that Sevele is seeing if perhaps he can wrangle a further pot-sweetener or two before the Defense Board decides the issue.

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